

FINAL REPORT
MERCY CORPS' PROJECT TO PROVIDE EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO IDPs
IN NORTHEASTERN AFGHANISTAN
AGREEMENT NUMBER: AOT-G-00-01-00059-00

I. Executive Summary

Organization: Mercy Corps	Date: June 30, 2002
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Project Title:	Emergency Assistance to IDPs in Northeastern Afghanistan
Grant Number:	AOT-G-00-01-00059-00
Country/Region:	Northeastern Afghanistan – Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces
Disaster/Hazard:	Conflict between the Taliban and Northern Alliance / Drought
Period Ending:	March 31, 2002

II. Program Overview

Through decades of war, political strife, and environmental disaster, poverty has become endemic in Afghanistan. Due to poor nutrition, a semi-nomadic existence and lack of government infrastructure, child and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world, and adult life spans are among the shortest. Sustained drought and fighting between northern warlords and the Taliban triggered population migration into areas with greater food and employment security. Two of these perceived 'safe havens' were Takhar and Badakhshan provinces.

In response to the increased numbers of displaced and highly vulnerable populations, Mercy Corps entered into an agreement with the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance on January 11, 2001 to provide essential non-food items (NFI) to 3,000 internally displaced person (IDP) families. This project was later expanded in July of 2001 to allow for a second distribution of NFI to an additional 3,900 IDP and host families through March 31, 2002.

II. Project Performance

Total Budget (LOP) US\$	Project Duration	Males/ Females Benefited	Principal Quantifiable Outputs	Progress Towards Impact Indicators
1,494,908	Jan 2001– March 2002	20,700 20,700	6,900 families (41,400 + individuals) rec'd blankets, fuel, cooking kits and other essential household items.	First phase: 3,000 of 3,000 targeted IDP families identified and received near-complete distributions. Second phase: Additional 3,900 families identified and received near-complete distributions (See Annex A).

Project Goal: The goal of the project was to alleviate suffering and improve the basic living conditions of conflict and drought-affected IDP families and their hosts in Northeastern Afghanistan.

Project Objective: Provide a package of essential non-food items to 6,900 IDP and needy host families, directly benefiting approximately 41,400 people in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces where the war and drought displaced are most in need of assistance.

Repeated assessments of drought and conflict-affected populations in northern Afghanistan revealed a deficit in basic household assets: cookware, fuel, and insulation. The first phase beneficiaries (3,000 families) received more than 95% of the intended distribution items. Following OFDA approval of a grant modification and extension, Mercy Corps selected an additional 3,000 impoverished families and 900 host families displaced throughout Takhar and Badakhshan provinces for non-food item assistance. The percentage increase in distribution coverage from phase one to phase two is an indication of initial population movement and adoption of more effective import strategies. In total, distribution activities reached more than 41,400 temporary residents of IDP camps, public shelters, host homes, and squatters in dilapidated buildings and makeshift housing at the village periphery.

Please see Annex A for a detailed breakdown of items procured and distributed. Refer to Annex B for distribution locations.

III. Project Achievements: Finding Solutions for Constraints

Constraint: Import politics

Mercy Corps encountered numerous and frequent problems with procurement and importation through its logistics base in Tajikistan. Logistics personnel were faced with a continual barrage of confusing and near daily changes to rules and regulations for export and even transit from Tajikistan into Afghanistan. Regulations and necessary signatures could be obtained and rendered obsolete overnight, often after considerable expenditures and effort to ship items to the border ports.

Intransigent Tajikistan customs officials and Russian military forces complicated this situation by closing borders due to perceived risk of military action, soliciting bribes and removing transshipments from Mercy Corps' control as drivers and personnel were not allowed to cross the border with supplies. Shortages were frequently encountered upon receipt in Afghanistan. In addition, border customs officials and guards delayed shipment in an apparent effort to elicit materials for personal or institutional gain, i.e. cash or supplies. Mercy Corps personnel were occasionally requested to provide cash, radios, vehicle repair parts and personal comfort items. Refusal to provide these items seldom resulted in an outright refusal to cooperate but unexpected "delays" were often encountered.

Solution:

Since drivers and vehicles continued to be blocked at the border, Mercy Corps rented trucks to transport items from Dushanbe warehouses, shipped items across the river, reloaded onto a second set of vehicles and moved to warehousing and distribution points in Afghanistan. Complex transport logistics required hiring additional personnel in Dushanbe to adequately meet program needs.

Mercy Corps sought out a more sustainable solution through negotiations with the governments of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Later in the project, both governments agreed to issue visas to Mercy Corps drivers from Tajikistan, thus significantly decreasing transit times and material shortages.

Local procurement provided another innovative solution. The recent political overhaul in Afghanistan enabled Mercy Corps to tender and contract supply purchases within the country, as per agency policy. Drawing on Afghan traders' centuries of transport and trade experience, this change resulted in reduced transportation costs, faster delivery and a stimulated economy.

Constraint: Cotton export forbidden

After contracting Tajikistan vendors to deliver cotton for IDP sleeping mats (as per the OFDA-authorized modification to this grant), cotton was declared a "strategic" commodity with export forbidden.

Solution:

Following long delays and numerous negotiations with the ministries and vendors involved, Mercy Corps arranged to have the sleeping mats pre-manufactured and then exported as merchandise instead of as a raw commodity. Although this solution did not substantially alter costs, it did leave Mercy Corps with a supply of already purchased cotton cloth and sewing kits (which explains the delayed distribution in Annex A). These items were distributed alongside the sleeping mats for general use by the beneficiaries, thereby increasing their viability.

Constraint: *Insecurity and beneficiary movement*

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the subsequent military actions in Afghanistan and the fall of Taliban-controlled territories, a spontaneous and chaotic movement of IDPs occurred as tens of thousands of displaced people chose to return to their homes. Mercy Corps, along with other NGOs active in the area, rapidly lost track of pre-identified beneficiaries, some after receiving partial distributions.

Solution:

Mercy Corps responded by hiring additional personnel to track beneficiaries into previously inaccessible areas and reassess their needs. Population shifts were primarily between the Badakhshan and northern Takhar provinces into the southern Takhar and Kunduz provinces.

Tracking population movement required additional expenditures for personnel, vehicles, office and warehouse spaces and transport to new locations. These efforts were hampered by security concerns in the areas of return. Isolated pockets of Taliban resistance and banditry made some areas unsafe for aid workers to perform surveys and distributions in parts of Takhar and Kunduz provinces. As these areas became secure, Mercy Corps was at the forefront of the effort to track needy beneficiaries.

Since most families were returning to homes that were often completely destroyed and sacked of useable household items, OFDA-granted materials continued to meet immediate need. Mercy Corps personnel successfully tracked most beneficiaries to complete the distributions.

Constraint: *Lack of humanitarian coordination*

Due to security concerns during military actions in the post September 11th period, most UN personnel were required to remain outside of Afghanistan. This absence, particularly of UNOCHA, created a void of coordination amongst the various agencies working to alleviate the problems facing IDPs and other populations within the country.

Solution:

Mercy Corps spearheaded an effort to coordinate activities and areas of responsibility in the northeastern provinces (Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz). This coordination effort, inclusive of OFDA-grantees (including Shelter Now International - aka Shelter For Life, Concern Worldwide and ACTED) and other NGOs, resulted in a massive rapid-assessment of former Taliban-controlled territories to locate selected beneficiaries and assess additional needs. Assessment findings were freely disseminated with interested agencies and were instrumental in facilitating the aid community's recognition and response to evolving humanitarian needs.

Constraint: *Inflation*

The influx of foreign journalists and newly arrived non-governmental agencies after the initiation of hostilities in October of 2002 impacted project costs and the Afghan economy. Injection of considerable amounts of cash into the economy inflated cost of living for national staff, and salaries for agencies working in the northeast. Where experienced engineers had been earning approximately \$200 per month, relatively unskilled translators were suddenly earning as much as \$150 per day. Auto rentals skyrocketed from as little as \$200 per month to as high as \$75 per day.

With a recent decrease in journalistic activities, these prices have stabilized but are still much higher than the previous rates.

Solution:

Continued inflation in the local market contributed to a complete overhaul of Mercy Corps' national staff salary scales and benefits in order to ensure uninterrupted implementation of project activities.

ANNEX A.

ITEMS DISTRIBUTED & PERCENTAGE COMPLETE

Item Distributed	Quantity Per Family	PHASE 1			PHASE 2		
		Proposed Number of Families	Number of Families Received	Percent Complete	Proposed Number of Families	Number of Families Received	Percent Complete
Blankets	6 Pcs	3,000	2,868	95.6	3,900	3,900	100
Diesel Fuel	32 Liters	3,000	3,000	100	3,900	3,900	100
Cook Pot	1 Pc	3,000	2,955	98.5	3,900	3,900	100
Plate	6 Pcs	3,000	2,938	98	3,900	3,900	100
Skimmer	1 Pc	3,000	2,995	99	3,900	3,900	100
Ladle	1 Pc	3,000	2,960	98.5	3,900	3,900	100
Spoon	6 Pcs	3,000	2,938	98	3,900	3,900	100
Bucket	1 Pc	3,000	2,960	98.7	3,900	3,900	100
Floor Mat	1 & 1.5m	3,000	2,960	98.7	3,900	3,900	100
Cook Pan	1 Pc	3,000	2,946	98.5	3,900	3,900	100
Floor Cover	1 Pc	3,000	2,947	98.5	3,900	3,900	100
Axe	1 Pc	3,000	2,962	98.8	3,900	3,900	100
Cups	6 Pcs	3,000	2,956	98.7	3,900	3,900	100
Kettle	1 Pc	3,000	2,937	98.4	3,900	3,900	100
Tray	1 Pc	3,000	2,923	97.4	3,900	3,900	100
Wash Tub	1 Pc	3,000	2,969	98.9	3,900	3,900	100
Sleeping Mat	3 Pcs	000	000		3,900	3,847	98.6
Cotton Cloth	15 m	3,000	000		000	2,795	100
Sewing Kit	3 Pcs	3,000	000		000	1,046	35
Wood	200kg	000	000		3,900	3,900	100
Stoves					3,900	3,900	100
Coal*	400kg	000	000		3,900	3,900	100
Fuel (Diesel)	32 Liters	3,000	3,000	100	3,900	3,900	100

**Phase II coal supplemented by private funds*

ANNEX A. (Page 2)

ITEMS PURCHASED / DISTRIBUTED

Item	Quantity Purchased	Quantity Distributed	Remains in Stock
Blanket	17,998	17,208	790
Blanket (Phase 2)	23400	23400	0
Diesel Fuel	220,800	220,800	0
Cook Pot	6,900	6,855	45
Plate	41,400	41,025	375
Skimmer	6,900	6,895	5
Ladle	6,900	6,860	40
Spoon	41,400	41,028	372
Bucket	6,900	6,860	40
Floor Mat	8,850m	8,810m	40m
Cook Pan	6,900	6,855	45
Floor Cover	6,900	6,847	53
Axe	6,900	6,862	38
Cup	18,000	17,735	265
Cup (Phase 2)	23400	23400	0
Kettle	6,900	6,837	63
Tray	6,900	6,823	77
Wash Tub	6,900	6,875	25
Sleeping Mat		11,541	
Cotton Cloth		41,931	
Sewing Kit	9000	3138	6862
Wood	780,000kg	780,000kg	0
Stoves	3,900	3,900	0
Coal*	1,560,000kg	1,560,000kg	0
Fuel (Diesel)	124,800 Liters	124,800 Liters	0

* Phase II coal supplemented by private funds.

ANNEX A. (Page 3)

TOTAL BENEFICIARY FAMILIES (by Area)

LOCATION (Phase 1)	FAMILIES	LOCATION (Phase 2)	FAMILIES
Dashti Qala	1336	Hazar Bagh	2154
Lala Guzar	474	Kalafan, Fakhar, Taloqan	1746
Yangi Qala	606		
Chayab	84		
Faizabad	500		

ANNEX B. (Page 1)

GEO-REFERENCING DATA

ORGANIZATION	MERCY CORPS
DATE	15 MARCH 2002
COUNTRY	AFGHANISTAN

ADMIN1	ADMIN2	PLACE	LAT/LONG	SECTOR/ ACTIVITY	START	END	TARGET POPULATION
Takhar	Taloqan	Taloqan	N 36° 43' 53.4 E 69° 33' 06.2	Offices	October 01	March 02	n/a
Takhar		Rustaq	N 37° 08' 21.2 E 69° 47' 97.0	Office/ Distribution			
Kunduz		Nijny Pianj	N 37° 11' 41.6 E 68° 34' 40.4	Border Crossing			
Badakhshan		Faizabad	N 37° 06' 31.1 E 70° 33' 59.3	Offices/ Distribution	January 01	March 02	
Kunduz	Kunduz	Kunduz	N 36° 43' 44.5 E 68° 52' 05.7				